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THE COMMUNISTIC COLONY OF BETTINA.

(1846-8)

LOUIS REINHARDT.

[The following account represents the substance of an interview with Mr. Reinhardt, of Arneckeville, De Witt County, Texas, who is one of the first settlers in this community. The visionary undertaking here described has become famous among German-Americans in this State on account of the connection with it of Hon. Gustave Schleicher, Dr. Herff, and many other prominent men.—RUDOLPH KLEBERG, JR.]

This colony owed its origin to the efforts of Prince Solms-Braunfels, Baron von Meusebach, and H. Spies, each successively holding the office of general agent of the *Adelsverein*.¹

The colony was organized in 1846 in Darmstadt. It received its name in honor of Bettina v. Arnim, a German writer, but it was better known as the Darmstaedter Kolonie while its members were generally called the *Vierziger* (men of the forties).

Prince Solms had been in Texas as early as 1844, and his accounts, as well as those of Spies, in writings and speeches caused a sensation among the students of the universities of Giessen and Heidelberg. Solms also made a speech to the students of the industrial school (*Gewerbeschule*) in Darmstadt, where I was studying, and his extravagant descriptions made the students mad. He remarked that there was no demand in the old country for all the professional men whom the universities were turning out, and that they must find a new and developing country where their

¹*The Adelsverein*, or Union of Princes, was a corporation composed of a number of counts and dukes belonging to the lesser German nobility, and having for its object "the colonizing and promoting of German immigration to Texas on a large scale." It is impossible here to describe in detail the plans and history of this remarkable organization; but a full account can be found in the memorial volume of the semi-centennial of the city of Fredericksburg by Robert Penniger—a highly interesting sketch of a phase of Texas history which is practically unknown in Anglo-American circles. R. K., JR.

services would be in demand. He glowingly described Texas as a land of milk and honey, of perennial flowers, of crystal streams rich and fruitful beyond measure, where roamed myriads of deer and buffalo, while the primeval forests abounded in wild fowl of every kind. And what he said was true. It is a glorious land; and I am glad that I came here.

It was in this way that Gustave Schleicher, a graduate of the University of Giessen and already an engineer on the Meinecker Road, and Wundt, a student of law, were won for the enterprise. A communistic society was organized of which friendship, freedom, and equality were the watchwords. It had no regular scheme of government, so far as I know. In fact, being communistic, the association would not brook the tyranny of a ruler. But the guiding spirits were by common consent Messrs. Wagner, Herff, Schleicher, and Schenk. Being the youngest of the whole company—I was thirteen—I was, of course, rarely consulted. The general director of the industrial school had purchased my freedom from my father with the understanding that I should botanize in Texas. I was well satisfied at first; and Herff and Schleicher treated me like a son.

In Feb., 1847, we left for Hamburg and remained there for several weeks until our ship had discharged her cargo. In April we sailed. Our party consisted of about forty men of whom I remember the following:

Dr. Herff.....	physician.
Dr. Schulz.....	..
Schleicher	engineer.
Lerch	architect.
Zoellner .....	..
Friedrich	lawyer.
Wundt .....	..
Fuchs ..	..
Schleunig ..	..
Amelung ..	..
Hesse ..	..
Wagner ..	..
Herrman ..	forester.
Schenck ..	..
Kuegler ..	..
Vogt ..	..
Louis ..	..
Strauss ..	mechanic.

Flach	mechanic.
Schunk	carpenter.
Neff . . . . .	..
Neff	butcher.
Deichert	blacksmith.
Hahn	lieutenant of artillery.
Kappelhoff	ship carpenter.
Michel	brewer.
Ottmer	milller.
Bub	hotel keeper.
Mertins	student of theology.
Backofen	maker of musical instruments.
Lindheimer	naturalist.
Mueller	agriculturist.
Rock	an American, who joined in Victoria.

There was no one in our party who could speak English except the cook, who had been in America several times. Dr. Herff had learned the language from books and could manage to make himself understood.

We had a good voyage with no incidents of general interest. We landed at Galveston, July 17, 1847. Dr. Herff and Spies who had sailed ahead of our party here met us, and we were quartered in the William Tell Hotel, kept by a Swiss and the only inn there at that time. A grand reception awaited us; and, being a jolly company, we found no difficulty in showing our appreciation.

As the schooner which was to carry us to Indianola was under repairs, we waited several weeks. When the ship was at last in a condition to sail, she was pressed into service as a transport by the United States government, the war with Mexico being then in progress. We finally succeeded in getting another ship; but when we were ready to sail, the captain was on a "spree." In spite of this, however, we started off; yet before we were far out, the ship struck a sandbank and some planks flew out from behind. The captain began to lower the boat on the pretext of going ashore and securing aid; but before he could carry out his purpose, Dr. Herff with drawn pistol informed him that if it came to drowning the captain would be compelled to stay and perish with us. Here Kappelhoff, who was a ship-carpenter, took charge of the vessel, and by keeping close to the shore, we reached Indianola after five days.

Here twenty-four ox wagons had been waiting for us for three

weeks; since Meusebach, the general agent of the *Adelsverein*, had seen to everything. In addition, he there bought two wagons of six yokes of oxen each, and two mule teams of eight mules each, for we had an immense amount of baggage. In addition to what we had brought from home and had purchased at Darmstadt, we had laid in a big supply at Hamburg and Galveston. We had supplies of every kind imaginable; for instance, complete machinery for a mill, a number of barrels of whiskey, and a great many dogs of whom Morro was the largest, being three feet high. We came prepared to conquer the world.

In Indianola \$10,000 in American gold was paid to us as a premium for settling Fisher's grant by Consul Lee. After a journey of four weeks, our train reached New Braunfels in August. Our trip was comparatively uneventful. We camped on the prairie and sang, drank, and enjoyed ourselves the whole way as only the German student knows how to do. We lived like the gods on Olympus and our favorite song on this tour was

*Ein freies Leben fuehren wir
Ein Leben voller Wonne, &c.*

In New Braunfels, Schenk and I fell sick with typhoid, while Deichert had the misfortune of being thrown from a horse and breaking his leg. Thus we were unable to move for nearly five weeks; but the whole company waited for us, having no thought of leaving the sick. In New Braunfels on the *Vereinshuegel* (Union Hill) a treaty was made between Meusebach, Spies, and Von Koll representing the Colony, and the Comanches by which the Indians agreed to vacate to our party the tract lying between the Llano and San Saba, and known as Fisher's Grant. The Indians were here represented by their chief Santana (also written Santa Anna) and two others accompanied by Baron v. Kriewitz, Santana's squaws, and his doctor.

Kriewitz had been among the Comanches several months as commercial agent of the colonists at New Braunfels and Fredericksburg according to the wish of the savages themselves. But the Indians did not trust him, looking upon him as a spy; and it is said that his life was thrice saved by Santana's daughter. Kriewitz at the making of the treaty was dressed like an Indian; but at last one of our party recognized him and gazed intently at him. Here-

upon Kriewitz then touched him under the table with his foot. Kriewitz was then handed a piece of paper and pencil, and he wrote back that he was Kriewitz, but that he could not hold open communication with them now; that on the journey back to the Indian camp he would try to get away. He went back with the savages as far as Comanche Spring and escaped, and lay hid in New Braunfels three days while the Indians came to look for him. They came to our own room; and here I saw Santana for the first time. But as far as the treaty went, they kept that to the letter, and later they visited our settlement as they had stated at the time of the treaty. We also were faithful to the compact.

After the sick had recovered, we set out for Fredericksburg, stopping a few days at Comanche Spring, later Meusebach's farm. Kriewitz was our guide, and as he rode ahead of us, one could not have told him from an Indian. Having again spent several days in Fredericksburg we set out for our tract, Kriewitz again being our guide.² Of course, we had to move very slowly; and, when we arrived at the Llano, we hunted a ford for three days. The best one finally proved to be but a few yards from our camp, where we had to lift the wagons four feet upon a rock in the bottom of the river by the aid of windlasses, and this work took us from morning until night.

The Llano then was a beautiful stream, as clear as crystal, and known in our party as the "Silvery Llano." One could see the bottom at the deepest places. The whole country was covered with mesquite grass as high as the knee, and abounded in buffalo and deer.

On the other side we came to a big live-oak; and here we camped. Putting our wagons in a circle, we constructed a big tent in the centre, planted our cannon, and put out a guard. Feeling perfectly secure in our fortified camp, we celebrated that night until 3 o'clock. A bowl of punch was prepared, and we sang our favorite songs, while those who could performed on musical instruments of which we had a whole chest. We gave *Lebe Hoch*, United States! *Lebe Hoch*, Texas! For we were all good patriots. This was in the early part of September, 1847.

We built a huge structure of forks and cross beams which we covered with reed-grass. It was forty feet long and twenty-two

²See his own account in *Entwicklungs Geschichte*, p. 117.—R. K., JR.

feet wide. Afterwards we constructed an adobe house covered with shingles. A large pecan-tree supplied us with 10,000 of these. In this house was a fire place 12 feet broad and built of rock. On the roof, Strauss put an artistic weather-vane. Here we celebrated the Christmas of 1847, and again had a glorious time.

As I have said, the Indians kept their agreement to the letter. In Nov., 1847, they visited us as they had promised. At the time I was herding cows several miles from our camp, when two Indians rode up. From their signs I supposed they wanted something to eat; and I handed them some bread out of the pouch I carried. Evidently not trusting me, they made signs that I should eat first. The fact was that a great number of Waco Indians had been treacherously poisoned some time before by a band of cow-boys. It was a dastardly deed; and the Wacos thereafter became the most hostile of the tribes, as before they had been the most amicable. Well, the end of my interview was that they took everything I had and galloped off. They were hardly out of sight when I saw a big crowd of savages riding up, and as they drew nearer, I recognized the chief, Santana. Upon my asking him if he were not the chief, he seemed greatly surprised that I should know him. He was very much puzzled, too, because I had no beard; for all our party wore them. I told him with my fingers that I was only seventeen. Doubtless he had at first taken me for an American, as none of them wore beards at this time. After that, the Indians drove my cattle, which now had scattered in all directions, into camp. Here Santana learned that I had been robbed, and sent out two men after the thieves, but after two days absence they reported that they were unable to find the robbers.

The Indians camped only a short distance from us. During the night a number of our utensils were stolen by the squaws; but the next day the men returned them. For everything we gave them we were paid back three-fold. As they staid some time, we became well acquainted. Whenever we came into their camp, they would spread out their deer skins, bring out morrals³ full of the biggest pecans I ever saw, and tell us to help ourselves. They even tried to learn German from us in spite of the great difficulty they found in pronouncing some of the words. The word *Pferd* they

³Food or game bags.

could not say at all; *Ross* was easier; but best of all they liked *Gaul*, which seemed to afford them great amusement. Other Indian tribes visited us, but none caused us the least annoyance. There were Lipans, Delawares, Kickapoos, Wacos, Choctaws, Shawnees, and Comanches, making seven different tribes. After January, 1848, no more Indians came.

Several Mormons arrived in the early spring to settle, but did not carry out their intention.⁴ Shortly afterwards Bickel who had made himself notorious in Fredericksburg came with some of his followers and began a settlement, known as that of the *Bickeliner*. The leader, however, soon disappeared. He had two wives who constantly quarreled. Next came the *Castellaner* who founded the settlement Castell, which still exists.⁵ Their families came in March, 1848.

In the summer of 1848, our colony of "Bettina" went to pieces like a bubble. As I have said, it was a communistic society and accordingly had no real government. Since everybody was to work if he pleased and when he pleased, the result was that less and less work was done as time progressed. Most of the professional men wanted to do the directing and ordering, while the mechanics and laborers were to carry out their plans. Of course, the latter failed to see the justice of this ruling, and so no one did anything. We had made a field and raised 200 bushels of corn—our whole year's crop. According to our contract with the *Adelsverein*, this company was to furnish us with supplies for the first year, but the next we were to shift for ourselves. As it was, we still had a plentiful supply of everything; yet that was bound to end some time; and there was absolutely no prospect of our ever providing for ourselves. I began to see this plainly. Having made arrangements with some teamsters who had brought us some goods, I started for Fredericksburg. Before I got there, eight others were on their way thither; and thus our colony went to the four winds. Bub was killed on the road by Indians.

I went to Meyersville, DeWitt County, Texas, and in that neigh-

⁴They afterwards settled near Fredericksburg. See *Geschichte des Adelsvereins*, p. 108.—R. K., JR.

⁵Named in honor of Count Karl of Castell, vice-president of the *Adelsverein*.—R. K., JR.

borhood I have lived ever since. When, after forty-eight years, I met Dr. Herff in San Antonio, we found that as far as both of us could determine, ten of our company were still living.

Sept. 7, 1898.